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THE OLD HIGHWAYS OF LOS ANGELES

By J. M. Guinn.

Of the old highways that lead out from the Pueblo of Los Angeles sixty years ago little remains. The march of improvement, the spirit of progress or some other iconoclast has transformed, transposed or obliterated them, so that but little is left to us beyond the direction in which they ran. Even the land marks that in the olden time guided the traveler on his way where the trail was faint, have disappeared or have been changed beyond recognition. These old caminos were not like the

“ road from Winchester town

A good broad highway leading down”

instead they were narrow trails on which the nimble footed mustang easily found his way but over which wheeled vehicles seldom ventured.

Along these roads there were no milestones to tell the distance; no guide boards to direct the way; no bridges across the rivers; no cuts through hills or fills of the gulches. If a mud hole impeded, it was easier to go around it than to fill it. If the winter rains cut a deeper channel in the arroyo leaving steeper banks on the sides it was more convenient to go up stream or down to find a crossing than to grade an incline to the former one. Even in the narrow canons where travel must follow in the same beaten track three-quarters of a century's use had not cut down a deep road bed like the sunken road of Ohain that was the undoing of Napoleon at Waterloo.

Under the rule of Spain and Mexico in California there seems to have been no road laws enacted. When a ranchero applied to the government for a grant he was requested to file a map of the tract of the land asked for. If there was a road crossing the proposed grant, it was marked on the diagram but as the maps usually were not drawn to any scale the road might vary miles from where it was delineated.

After the Americans possessed themselves of California, the old roads for some time remained in the same condition that they had been under the domination of Spain and Mexico. The country was too extensive and population too sparse to improve the

highways. For several decades the names were not changed. There was the Camino Real para San Gabriel y San Bernardino the highway to San Gabriel and San Barnardino. The Camino para La Jaboneria appeared on the county maps until quite a recent date. It was the lower road to San Juan Capistrano and San Diego. The upper road was via La Habra and Santa Ana (upper) to San Juan. On some of the maps it was called El Camino Viejo (the old road).

Leading out from the old pueblo to San Pedro were two historic roads, one by the Punta de La Laguna (point of the lagoon), and the other by the Rancho Los Cuervos. Over these in the olden time passed the commerce of Los Angeles and the contiguous country. The exports were hides and tallow transported on wooden wheeled ox-carts. The imports were family supplies, dress goods and Yankee notions that had come from Boston around Cape Horn in hide droghers.

Over the Camino by the Punta de La Laguna sixty years ago, came the advance guard of the Saxon invaders — Stockton's sailors and marines. Along its dusty length, mounted on wooden wheeled carretas drawn by oxen, they hauled their cannon. By no stretch of the imagination could Stockton's light ox-battery be transformed into flying artillery. Louder than the tramp, tramp, of the boys a marching rose the shriekings and creakings of the ungreased wooden axles of the carretas.

On the Camino by the way of the Rancho de Los Cuervos, Mervine and his men suffered defeat in the battle of Dominguez Rancho; and weary and worn, bearing their wounded and dead they retreated to their ship. They buried their dead on the Isla de Los Muertos, Isle of the Dead (now Deadman's Island).

Commerce long since deserted these old channels of trade; and travel found means of easier access to the City of the Angels. These historic old roads have been in part abandoned and in part changed. Steam first, electricity next; and lastly the real estate promoter with his subdivisions, his streets and avenues, has so transformed the landscape that the oldest inhabitant could not now locate with certainty a mile of the former road bed of these old caminos.

As population increased and the cattle industry decreased the subdivision of the great ranchos began and the existence of the old roads and the old system of free and easy road making ended. The roads were fenced in and the traveler was no longer allowed to make a trail where he pleased. Cut-offs were made in the

roads by bridging streams and by filling gulches that greatly reduced the distance between towns and settlements.

Some forty years ago the Stearns' Ranchos a great body of land in the southeastern part of the county containing nearly 200,000 acres was subdivided into sections and fractional parts of sections. Following the custom in many western states reservations were made along section lines for roads. As the land was sold and settlers improved their holdings the old caminos were wiped out of existence and new roads made on section lines. There is perhaps not five consecutive miles of the old highways of the Spanish and Mexican eras to day in use between the Los Angeles and the Santa Ana river and the same is true to a greater or less extent throughout the state.

Under the rule of Spain and Mexico, as I have said, there seems to have been no laws or no ordinances passed locating roads in California. Use established the right of way. After the Anglo-Saxon gained possession, with his proclivity for organization, it was not long till roads were officially located and laws and ordinances enacted for their government.

In the archives of Los Angeles County there is a decree of the Court of Sessions made May 19, 1851, establishing Caminos Publicos or Caminos Reales (public highways) in the County of Los Angeles which then included all the territory now embraced in the counties of San Bernardino and Orange, and also parts of Kern and Riverside counties. This decree officially establishes certain roads between the missions as public highways and where no subsequent ordinance has changed the road the old road is still a camino real and needs no legislation to establish it. I give the decree in full:

State of California, County of Los Angeles in the Court of Sessions, May term A. D. 1851 (May 19). Ordered that the following are declared to be public highways within this county as heretofore ordered by this court, to-wit:

Santa Barbara Road. (Camino para Santa Barbara)—From Los Angeles to Cahuenga, from Cahuenga to Encino, from Encino to Las Virgenes, from Las Virgenes to Triunfo.

Tulare Road to the Mines by the Tulares and to Santa Barbara (Camino para Las Minas por Los Tulares y para Santa Barbara.) By Cahuenga or Verdugo to San Fernando; from San Fernando to the Rancho of San Francisco; from San Francisco to the Canada of Alamos; from the Canada of Alamos to Rabbit Lake; from Rabbit Lake to Tejon.

Roads from Los Angeles to San Diego:

First, from Los Angeles to the Rancho of Curmurgu by the Abra to Santa Ana (upper) or Santa Ana of Theodosio Yorba, from Santa Ana (upper) to the Aliso, thence to the San Juan Capistrano Mission, thence by San Mateo to San Diego.

Second, by Las Laguanas to the Jaboneria, thence by the rancho of the Nietos, by the Tequisquite (land of the coyotes) to Santa Ana (middle) or the rancho of Don Jose Antonio Yorba, thence to the Aliso; thence to San Juan Capistrano and San Mateo.

San Bernardino and Sonora road. Los Angeles to San Gabriel and below Azusa between San Antonio and San Jose by the plain below the rancho of Cuca Monga, thence to the hill of Aguajeta by the Old Pueblo of the New Mexicans, known as the Land of Apolitan, by Jurupa and San Bernardino to Yucaipa and San Gorgonio.

Road to New Mexico:

Following the above to San Bernardino until arriving at Cuca Monga and from thence to the Cajon.

Colorado Road—Camino para el rio Colorado: From Los Angeles to the Mission San Gabriel, thence to the rancho of Puente, thence to the rancho of Ybarras, thence to the Sierra and Temescal and thence to the Laguna and Tamacold.

San Pedro Road: First by the plain called "Punta de La Laguna" and Palos Verdes to San Pedro. Second to the rancho of Los Cuervos, the rancho of Los Dominguez, Palos Verdes to San Pedro.

It is further declared that the roads between the Missions of San Fernando, San Gabriel and San Juan Capistrano, as they have been anciently established and used, shall be deemed public highways; and the roads in this order heretofore described are understood to be the roads existing as they have been long established and used.

I, B. D. Wilson, Clerk of the Court of Sessions, Los Angeles County, State of California, hereby certify that the above is a true copy of an order of said Court given under my hand and seal, May 24, 1851.

BENJ. D. WILSON, Clerk.

by Wilson Jones, Deputy.

Note that in the above order the judges of the Court of Sessions say, "the roads between the Missions," had there been one road, they would have used the singular number. There is no hint in this order of a royal road, evidently the men who com-

posed the Court of Sessions (the county judge and two justices of the peace) had never heard of the so-called King's highway, yet they had been in the country before the secularization of the missions, and some of them were born while Mexico was under the rule of a king.

The San Bernardino and Sonora Road named in the decree was also known as El Camino Real de San Gabriel y San Bernardino—the road to San Gabriel and San Bernardino. It is traced on the old maps of the ranchos through which it passed. It forms the south boundary of the Azusa rancho, passes through the San Jose and marks the boundary line between the ranchos Cucomongo and del Chino and on to San Bernardino and Sonora.

This old Camino Real that leads out from the pueblo of Angeles to the Mission of San Gabriel to the hill of spouting water, to Agua Manza, to the Land of Apolitan, through the Pass of San Gorgonia, across the desert of Colorado and on to Tubac in Sonora is the only one that has any claim to be called a King's Highway. Thirty thousand dollars were appropriated from the royal treasury to pay the expenses of Captain Anza's exploring expedition when in 1774 he opened up this route for travel. Over it, in 1775, Anza led the first immigrants who came to California—a band of 240 men, women and children bringing with them more than a thousand domestic animals. These pobladores were the advance guard of civilization. They built the presidio of San Francisco and founded San Jose the first colony in California. (A portion of this road stretching from Yuma to San Domingo on the border of Sonora was named by the Spanish Pioneers Camino del Diablo and today retains its evil name Devil's Highway. There is hardly a mile of its two hundred that is not marked by one or more cross-shaped stone heaps raised over the grave of victims who died of desert thirst.)

Over this Camino Real came citizen, soldier and priest. Across its desert stretches went Rivera and his fated band to their death, when the fierce Yumas sacked the missions on the Colorado. Along its dreary length rode Amador, Santa Ana's flying courier, with a message that saved the mission from the clutches of Hjar and Padres. Through its mountain passes and over its desert sands fled Castro and his adherents from the American invaders who had dispossessed them of the land of their birth. Over it came the vanguard of the Argonauts—the evangelists of a strenuous life—the harbingers of a new era for California, the most romantic, the most poetic, the grandest and most glorious in her history.